

# Task-Based Reading Activities Using Authentic Materials and Skills

In this webinar, we will:

- examine two reading activities that involve the station-based learning and authentic materials
- consider how these activities promote a range of reading skills while maximizing learner engagement, critical thinking, and learner autonomy
- explore options for adapting these classroom-tested ideas to succeed in a variety of ELT contexts



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# Mina Gavell



Mina has been working in the TESOL field since 2008. After teaching EFL in South Korea, she returned to the U.S. where she worked with international EAP students and obtained her MATESOL from Concordia University. In 2018, Mina served as a U.S. Department of State English Language Fellow in Uzbekistan, teaching English and ELT methodology and leading professional development events.

In January 2021, Mina returned to Uzbekistan as a Coach with the English-Speaking Nation project. Currently, she can be found in Mombasa, Kenya where she is serving as an English Language Fellow at the Technical University of Mombasa.



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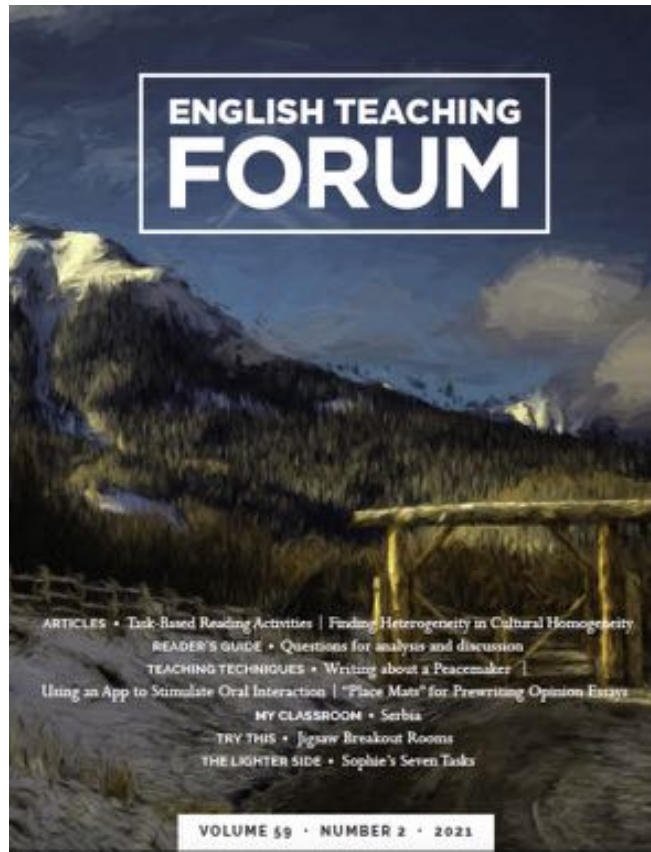
# Task-based Reading Activities Using Authentic Materials and Skills



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# Task-Based Reading Activities Using Authentic Materials and Skills



**MINA GAVELL**

United States

## Task-Based Reading Activities Using Authentic Materials and Skills

One of the biggest challenges that I, a seasoned English language teacher, have faced in the classroom is how to liven up reading classes. Of course, there are pre-discussions and post-discussions, as well as multiple ways to make accompanying tasks related to comprehension and vocabulary more fun, but reading itself is inherently a quiet and solo task. Furthermore, the standard skills we are trying to build in our students—skimming, scanning, making predictions and inferences, guessing vocabulary meaning from context—require practice, practice, practice. While useful and necessary, such practice can easily come to feel repetitive, redundant, and downright boring.

One solution I came up with while teaching university students in Uzbekistan combines the use of authentic materials, task-based learning, and stations. This article discusses this activity and how it evolved into two separate stages, both of which can easily be adapted for a variety of needs, levels, and age groups.

### **RATIONALE FOR A TASK-BASED READING ACTIVITY**

Importantly, this activity makes use of authentic materials. While there is a plethora of quality teaching texts that focus on reading skills, these materials were created for the purpose of being accessible to

skills. However, they have their limitations. Introducing authentic materials into the classroom can serve as an extension of or supplement to educational texts. Using materials not specifically designed for learners has numerous benefits, including greater interest (Martinez 2002) and motivation (Bazarna-Tihenea and Nadrag 2018; Guariento and Morley 2001). Moreover, authentic texts provide a necessary challenge, as a "main reason for using authentic materials in the classroom is once outside the 'safe', controlled language learning environment, the learner will not encounter the artificial language of the classroom but the real world and language how it is really used" (Berardo 2006, 67).



**How do you feel about teaching  
reading skills?**

**Opinions?  
Strategies?  
Challenges?**

# Today, we'll explore...



- Key concepts: *task, authentic materials, learning stations*



- Task stage 1: reading to explore and evaluate texts



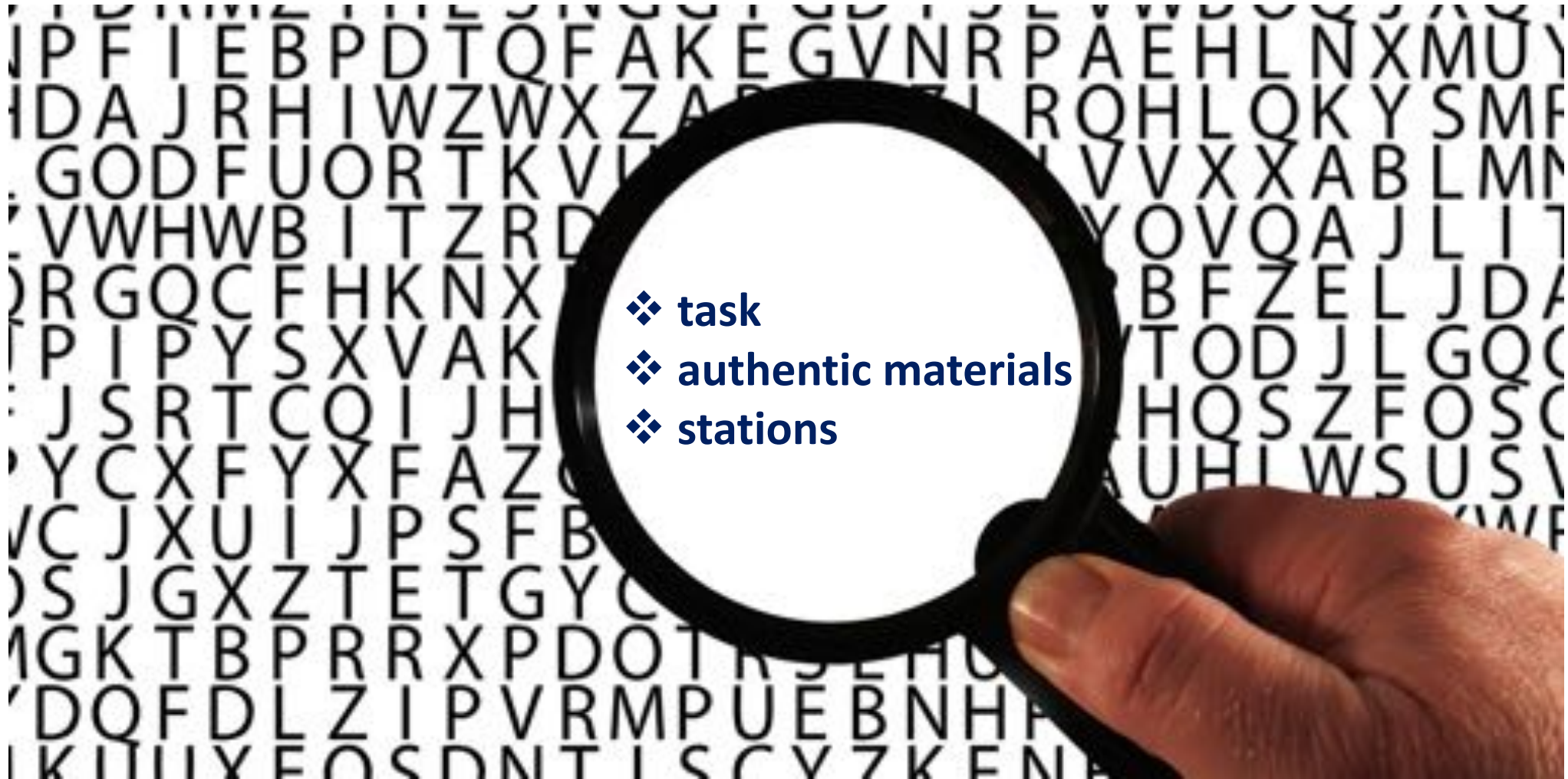
- Task stage 2: reading to decide, suggest, and advise

- Task benefits and challenges



- Adaptations for different contexts

# Let's review







# Stop and think

What does the term **task** mean to you?

**MINA GAVELL**

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# Task



What?	Why?
“goal-oriented activity in which learners use language to achieve a real outcome” (Willis, 2016)	Focus on meaning rather than form
Examples include games, information gap activities, role playing	Suitable for group/pair work



**Write 5 sentences  
using the simple  
past**

- Focuses on form
- More like an exercise

- Related to real life
- Requires interaction

**Interview your  
partner and write  
down 5 things s/he  
did last weekend**

***Which of these is a task?***



What does the term  
**authentic materials** mean to  
you?

MINA GAVELL  
United States

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# Authentic Materials

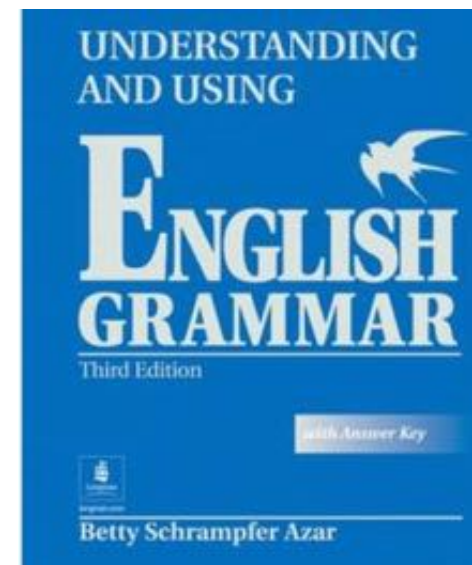
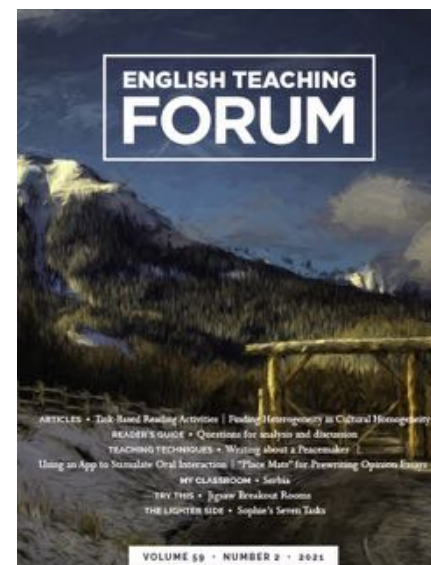
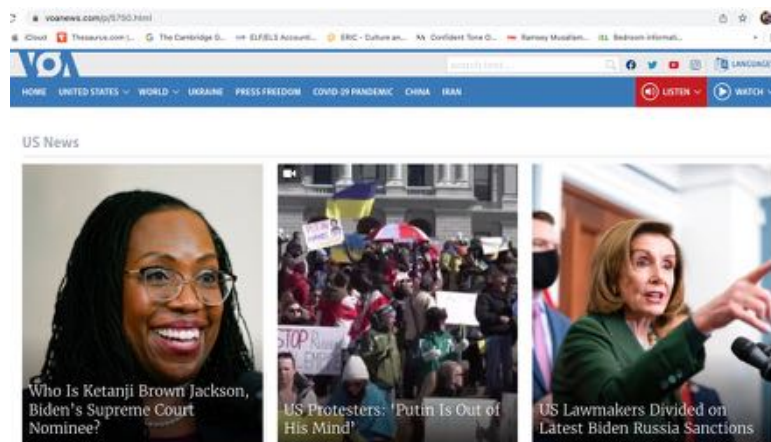


What?	Why?
Any texts except those created for language learning purposes	Interesting & motivating
Examples include books, magazines, newspapers, websites, brochures, emails, etc.	Prepares learners to use the language outside the classroom (Berardo, 2006)



# Stop and think

Which of these materials is **not** authentic?



# Stations

What?	Why?
Distinct physical work area within a classroom	Easy to keep materials organized
Separate desks, tables, or areas in the classroom	Forces students to move

# Stations





**Have you ever experienced  
learning stations as a learner or a  
teacher?**



# Today, we'll explore...



- Key concepts: *task, authentic materials, learning stations*



- Task stage 1: reading to explore and evaluate texts
- Task stage 2: reading to decide, suggest, and advise



- Task benefits and challenges



- Adaptations for different contexts

# Task Stage 1

Reading to explore and evaluate texts

## Context

- university-level reading & writing class of pre-service teachers
- 16 students
- 80-minute class

## Objective

practice reading skills, assess needs & interests, motivate students

- ❖ skimming & scanning
- ❖ identifying main idea
- ❖ understanding key details
- ❖ making inferences
- ❖ making a personal connection

# Stage 1: procedure

## 1. Collect authentic materials

- variety of types (books, newspaper, game instructions, map)
- both academic & non academic
- found at the university, home, and around town

## 2. Create questions

- text types
- main ideas
- detail
- inference
- usefulness



What authentic (or other)  
materials are available to  
you?

# Stage 1: procedure

## 3. Arrange the materials into stations





# Stage 1: procedure

4. **Pair or group students and hand out question worksheets**

5. **Give instructions**

- students can begin anywhere
- move at their own pace
- don't need to complete all stations
- can skip questions or ask for help

Station #1	1. Title:	
2. What is it?		3. Is it fiction or non-fiction?
4. Who is the intended audience?		5. Why would someone read this?
6. Would you read this? Why or why not?		
7. On what page can we learn about the Aral Sea?		8. The author Alex Ulko was the first person to do something. What was it?

Station #2	1. Title:	
2. What is it?		3. Is it fiction or non-fiction?
4. Who is the intended audience?		5. Why would someone read this?
6. Would you read this? Why or why not?		
7. On what pages can we learn about the Aral Sea?		8. The author Alex Ulko was the first person to do something. What was it?

To save paper,  
write questions  
on the board—  
students can  
write answers in  
notebooks



Station 4  
Forum

Station 3  
novel

Station 2  
newspaper

Station 1  
guidebook

Station 5  
menu

Station 6  
grammar  
book

Station 7  
map

Station 8  
catalogue

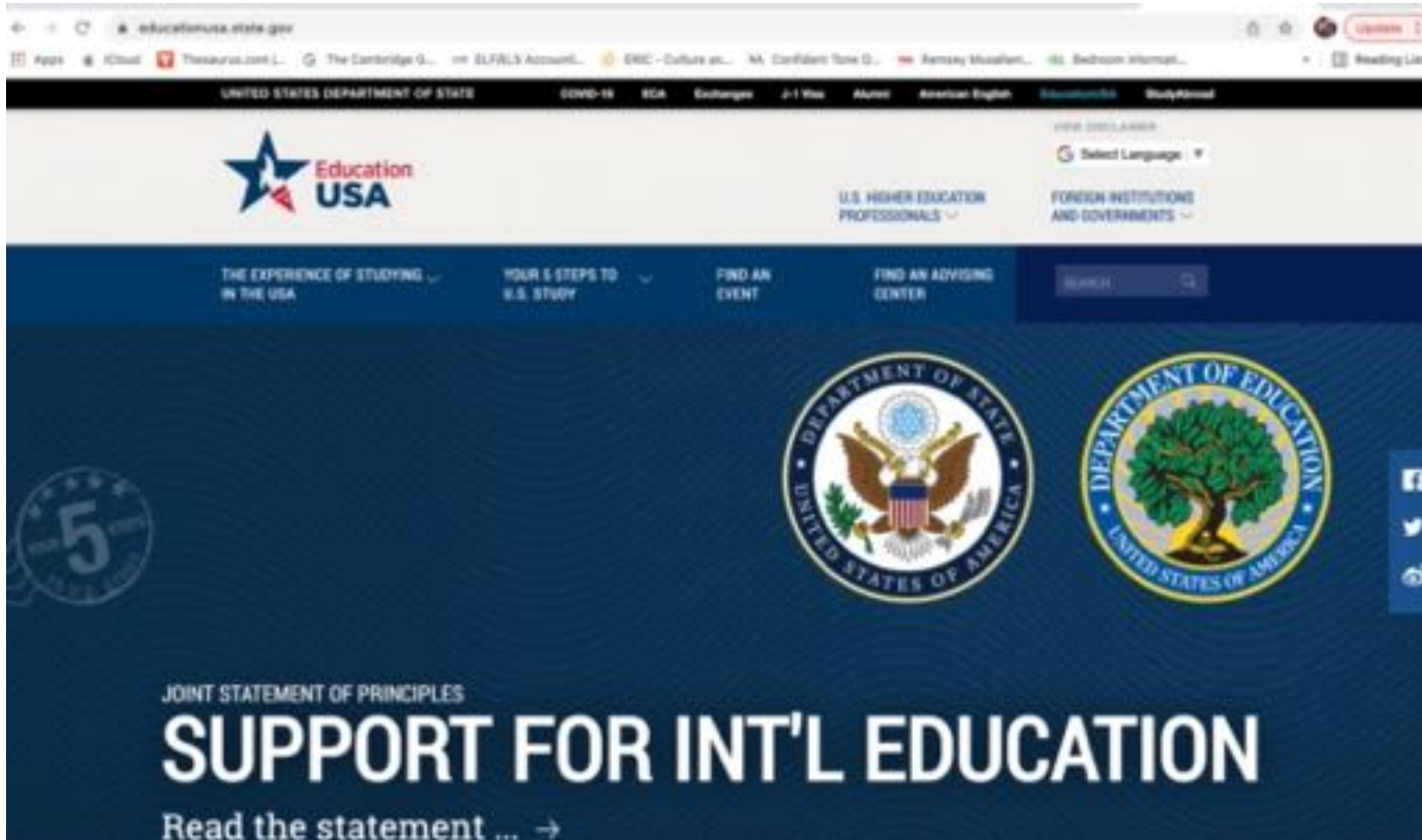
Station 9  
game  
instructions

# Stage 1: procedure

## 6. Ending the class (in a perfect world)

- final questions asking students to identify the skills they used & if they enjoyed the activity
- discussed areas of difficulty or confusion
- collected the worksheets to decide what to focus on for future lessons

# Let's try it



1. What is it?
2. Who is the intended audience?
3. Would you read this? Why or why not?



# Today, we'll explore...



- Key concepts: *task, authentic materials, learning stations*



- Task stage 1: reading to explore and evaluate texts



- Task stage 2: reading to decide, suggest, and advise

- Task benefits and challenges



- Adaptations for different contexts

# Task Stage 2

Reading for problem solving (deciding, suggesting, & justifying)

## Context (why)

- familiar with & interested in the materials
- shown a competent level in reading skills
- wanted to do the activity again

## Objective

- evaluate & choose texts for suitability
- make suggestions
- justify decisions

❖ more authenticity

❖ more critical  
thinking

# Stage 2: procedure

## 1. Collect more related materials for two different scenarios



Tim is an English teacher. He is researching some options for professional development and some ideas for his classes.



Maria is getting ready to begin a one-month trip. She will travel to Portland, OR, Turkey, Uzbekistan, and Kathmandu. She is doing some research to prepare for her trip.

# Stage 2: procedure

## 2. Create scenarios & questions



1. Tim wants to be a better grammar teacher. Please suggest a book that will help him to do this. Please explain why you suggested this book.	2. In April, Tim is attending a conference at Tribhuvan University in Nepal. He is interested in ways to make his classes more fun and interesting. Suggest two or three sessions for him to attend. What can he hope to learn in these sessions?	3. One of Tim's students wants to become a pharmacist. Which university should Tim recommend? Why?	4. Lately Tim's listening and speaking class has been quite boring. Suggest an article for him from <i>English Teaching Forum</i> . What can he learn from this article?	5. Tim is looking for a fun game to play in class to encourage his students to speak. Suggest a game that will be good for this. Why are you recommending this game?	6. Tim's students are in high school. He wants to assign a book to his reading/writing class. Suggest a book that will be appropriate for this age group. What is it about? Why is it a good choice?	7. Tim is really into his horoscope. His birthday is April 22. What can he expect in his future?
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**Tim**  
Tim is an English teacher. He is researching some options for professional development and some ideas for his classes.

# Stage 2: procedure

## 3. Arrange stations & questions

- desks pushed into 2 tables (1 for each scenario)
- questions cut up and put into 2 envelopes at the front of the class

## 4. Pair or group students

## 5. Give instructions

- choose 1 scenario & use only those questions & materials
- select 1 question at a time from the envelope & return when done
- write answers in notebooks
- answer all 7 questions





# Stage 2: procedure

## 6. Monitor & support

- much more challenging in terms of the task
- reassure students there often isn't 1 right answer
- insist they explain their choices

## 7. Ending the class

- larger groups get together to check answers
- share areas of confusion or interest with the class
- collect answers for future lesson planning



# Let's try it

## THE LIGHTER SIDE

### Sophie's Seven Tasks

Last week, Sophie completed tasks related to every article in this issue of *Forum*. But in what order? For each clue, decide which of the two tasks she completed first. (The first one has been done for you, as an example.) Then use all the clues to find the order in which she completed all the tasks. Number the tasks from 1 (first) to 7 (last):

#### Tasks

- \_\_\_ Reading the "My Classroom: Serbia" article
- \_\_\_ Sharing information in a jigsaw breakout room
- \_\_\_ Exchanging cultural information
- \_\_\_ Responding to a description of a room
- \_\_\_ Writing a report about a peacemaker
- \_\_\_ Working at reading stations
- \_\_\_ Participating in a place mat debate

#### Clues

1. Sophie first saw the Serbia article at one of the reading stations, but she read the article later.  
Which did she complete first? ☒ reading stations \_\_\_ My Classroom article
2. Just before Sophie left the breakout room, one of her friends asked her what she planned to do next. She said, "I'm going to read an article called 'My Classroom: Serbia.' It looks interesting!"  
Which did she complete first? \_\_\_ breakout room \_\_\_ My Classroom article
3. Reading about Serbia inspired Sophie to select a peacemaker from Europe for her report.  
Which did she complete first? \_\_\_ peacemaker report \_\_\_ My Classroom article
4. Sophie enjoyed doing the activities at the reading stations so much that she told her friends about them on her way to the culture-studies class.  
Which did she complete first? \_\_\_ culture activity \_\_\_ reading stations
5. When Sophie got her topic in her breakout room, she told her group members, "This topic is similar to the one I had yesterday for the place mat debate."  
Which did she complete first? \_\_\_ place mat debate \_\_\_ breakout room
6. Sophie took a break from writing her peacemaker report to submit her room-description assignment, and right after that, she finished her report. Then she was done with her tasks.  
Which did she complete first? \_\_\_ room description \_\_\_ peacemaker report
7. Sophie had a long walk from the culture-studies class to the class with the place mat debate.  
Which did she complete first? \_\_\_ place mat debate \_\_\_ culture activity

Answers on page 21

### English Club Email

Sara attended an English Club meeting and wrote about it the next day to her friend Lisa, who could not attend the meeting. But Sara did not mention the events at the meeting in the order they happened. Can you read her email and figure out the order in which things happened?

Hi, Lisa,

Sorry you weren't able to attend the English Club meeting yesterday.

It was a good meeting. The highlight was making plans for the picnic next month. The discussion took so long that we almost didn't have time for the Language Focus at the end of the meeting. I'll tell you more about the plans when I see you.

Oh, in Small-Group Discussion, we talked about the expression "Don't give up!" and related it to our lives and our communities. But I wonder if we should do those discussions right before the break instead of right after? We went straight from Small-Group Discussion to planning the picnic, and I think people would have enjoyed continuing to talk about "Don't give up!" during the break instead of having to cut off the conversation.

I was late for the meeting, so I missed the first part of the short-story discussion. But it was interesting! I thought about the story later when we were voting on a movie to watch next week. Should we watch movies that are based on the stories we read, or is that not important? Maybe I should have asked this question when we were choosing the movie, but before I could, it was time for the break.

Actually, we didn't have much time to choose the movie because we had a lot of new members at the meeting. Their introductions, right after the story discussion, took a long time. But it's great to have new people in the club!

Many people asked about you after the meeting, and I said you will definitely be at the next one. Talk to you soon!

Sara

Now write numbers in the blanks to show the order in which the following things happened. Write "1" for the thing that happened first, "2" for the thing that happened second, and so on.

- |                            |                              |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| ___ Small-Group Discussion | ___ people asked about Lisa  |
| ___ Language Focus         | ___ picnic planning          |
| ___ movie selection        | ___ break                    |
| ___ short-story discussion | ___ new-member introductions |

I'm looking for an activity to help my students focus on the meaning of verb tenses, rather than just form.

Which do of these activities do you recommend? Why?



# Let's try it

- Read seven things Sophie does.
- Use tenses & time signals to figure out which of **2** activities happen first.

### Sophie's Seven Tasks

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# Let's try it

- Read an email about yesterday's English club meeting.
- Use tenses & time signals to put **all 8** events in the correct order.

## English Club Email

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*Actually, we didn't have much time to choose the movie because we had a lot of new members at the meeting. Their introductions, right after the story discussion, took a long time. But it's great to have new people in the club!*

*Many people asked about you after the meeting, and I said you will definitely be at the next one. Talk to you soon!*

*Sara*

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- Task benefits and challenges



- Adaptations for different contexts

# Benefits

- uses authentic materials to motivate, challenge, & engage
- task-based approach promotes focus on meaning, critical thinking & interaction
- use of stations necessitates movement
- students are allowed and encouraged to make their own choices



**The freedom to make choices increases engagement and motivation; in addition, physically changing locations is a sure way to activate the brain (Jensen 2005; Kuczala 2019).**



# Stop and think

What are some of the  
**challenges** of these  
activities?

## Where can I get authentic materials?



- print from websites
  - websites
  - stories
  - advertisements
- computers, tablets, phones
- student work
- receipts
- emails
- realia (medicine, cosmetics, food, etc.)



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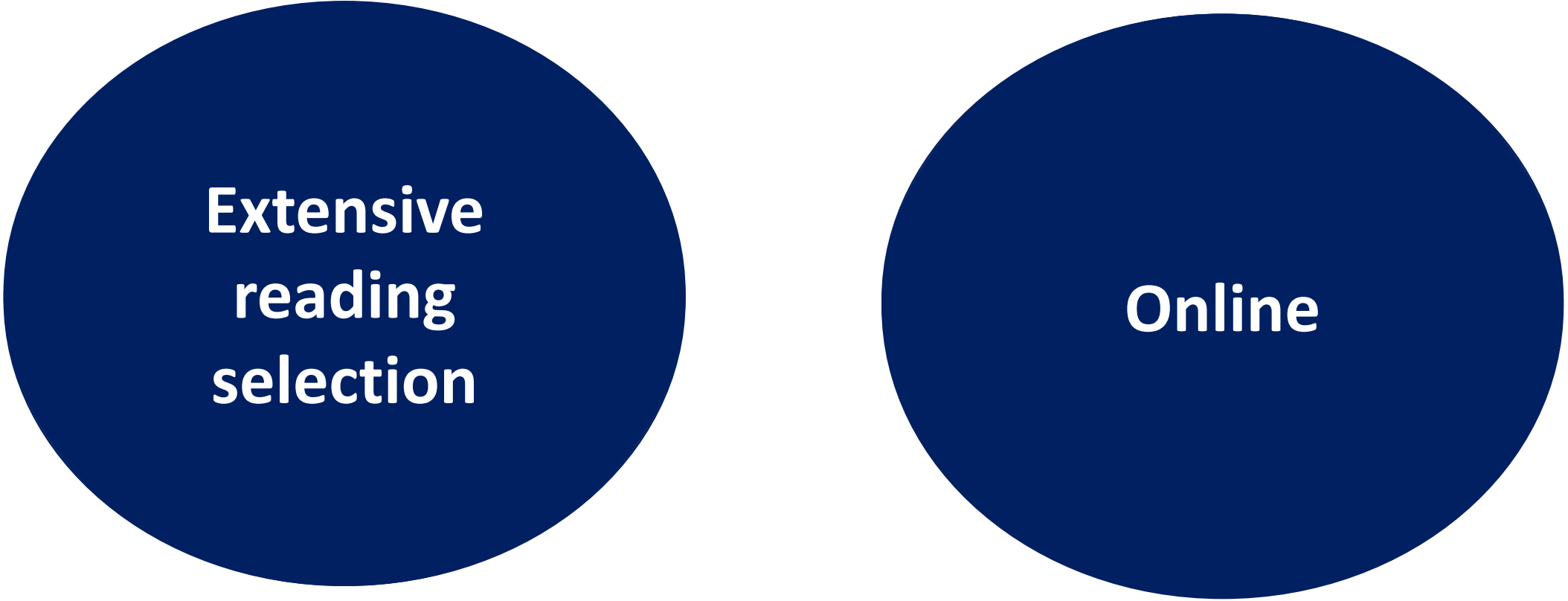


- Task benefits and challenges



- Adaptations for different contexts

# Adaptations



**Extensive  
reading  
selection**

**Online**



**Can you think of some ways to use or adapt these ideas in your classroom?**

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# Thank you!

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# Reflection Questions

1. Based on the meaning-focused, goal-oriented explanation of “tasks” shared in the webinar, how might you convert some of your existing ELT “activities” into “tasks”?
2. How could you overcome challenges associated with creating or using learning stations in your classes?
3. Did you gain any new ideas for incorporating authentic reading texts into tasks or activities? How might you expand your collection of authentic English-language texts?



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